

## 2007 CREP Renewal Recommendations

Our state and federal CREP agreements expire in 2007, but because FSA will be occupied with the Farm Bill renewal that same year, it is important to complete as much CREP renewal work as possible in 2006. The CREP committee has developed a draft set of recommendations that are listed below. Initially, these came from interviews with conservation districts in the fall of 2005 and from suggestions made during CREP committee conference calls. All suggestions were compiled in the CREP report drafts and reviewed by the districts in the last three months. Our next step is to meet in Ellensburg with Rod Hamilton and Frank Easter in late May to fully discuss each recommendation and formulate agreeable language. We will then develop justification papers for each recommendation prior to meeting with other natural resource agencies that are key to state and federal agreement.

Here are the draft recommendations for the CREP renewal. During the April CREP committee conference call, comments were made on many of these, and those are shown in blue text.

- Seek a way to incorporate a minimum 35' buffer regardless of floodplain option into the CREP program so that small parcels can be enrolled more easily. Currently, larger buffers take up a much greater percentage of these lands resulting in non-participation and no buffers at all. Programmatic guidance is needed clarifying that projects on small parcels are as important as large projects in restoring and protecting riparian buffers.
  - Everyone was in agreement on this one.
- Expand the eligible practices to potentially include wetland restoration, hedgerows, grass filter strips, and other practices as developed by the CREP committee with input from FSA and resource agencies.
  - Rod Hamilton had the following comments. It will be easy to add grass filter strips and wetland restoration, but more challenging to add hedgerows and field borders. When possible, use NRCS standards. One issue is the location of the projects. The farther from the stream (field borders), the less likely there will be support. For all, use the 303(d) List as justification for water quality improvements. Should expect less restoration costs and rental payments. Alison Bower stated that grass filter strips along ditches would be a big benefit in eastern Washington.
- Seek changes in the Washington CREP to include all types of agricultural lands in Washington, such as orchards, berries, and vineyards.
  - Rod thought it would be possible to add these. Other annual crops are eligible. Perennial crops such as mint, hops, and asparagus are not eligible. Hay is also ineligible and would be difficult to get approval.
- Rental rates are still too low, and will be a larger problem in the future as more financial incentives will be needed to motivate remaining landowners. Soil alone should not determine rental rates. The current rates do not cover irrigation and taxes in some areas of eastern Washington. The current rates are also not competitive with developmental pressure in western Washington. Options should be explored in the CREP Committee.
  - Irrigation cost reimbursements died out because of water rights issues. A couple suggestions were to pay higher incentives instead, and raise the

rates to \$400-450/acre/year (similar to Whatcom) to get more participation. However, it was pointed out that the underlying rates are also used in CRP and unlikely to be changed. It was also suggested to raise the rates for the first 35 feet of buffer, but Rod pointed out that it would be a disincentive for large landowners.

- Reestablish the original SIP payment to \$10/acre/contract year. This payment was intended to provide landowners with working capital to install best management practices (BMPs). Material costs have increased substantially since the program started and this incentive payment is even more important now.
  - Rod said this would be an uphill battle. Bob Barker suggested that the CDs talk to land owners and find out what will work in different parts of the state.
- Seek an increase in plant costs so that the actual maximum price of 1.75 is covered. This is a 25-cent cost increase for some plants and still well under what many other agencies and entities are paying for riparian restoration plants.
  - This has already improved, and no dissatisfaction has been expressed. Take it off the list?
- Increase caps for structural practices such as fence and water systems. Material costs for these BMPs have increased substantially since the hold-downs were established.
  - Rod said that the wording can be changed so that instead of having specific caps, the caps can be “established by the FSA committees and the Conservation Commission”. We should summarize current actual costs of these materials for justification.
- Seek changes in next contract so that local (not national) committees can approve additional costs (ex. off-site watering, fencing, extended maintenance).
  - We should ask for a “waiver of distance from the stream”.
- Examine the paperwork process and forms and try to simplify. Can the forms be electronic and linked so that information in common only be entered once? Can the paperwork burden to the landowner be reduced?
  - Rod stated that the program was targeted for the Farm Bill user, but many are unfamiliar with the Farm Bill, leading to increased difficulties. Due to federal requirements, this may be an unlikely change.
- Reinforce agency roles and oversight especially in areas that require technical expertise.
- Conservation easements should be added as an option. Skagit has had success in this area. Long-term rentals are available, but managed through IAC.
- Change specifications to allow for beaver damage mitigation such as overplanting of willows. Allow increased costs for beaver fencing.
- The small buffer option should also go to the urban committee.